

Krell, Randy L.

From: Hildebrand, Dean C.
Sent: Thursday, January 17, 2002 9:24 AM
To: -Grp-GF All Staff
Subject: Letter to the Editor Pertaining to the Opening of Pheasant Season

This is the letter I have prepared that I will be sending to the newspapers. It explains our position on the opening of pheasant season for 2002. I wanted to send it to you before I send it to the papers so you can be aware of my course of action.

I hope you all had a great holiday season. It's hard to believe we are in the middle of January. May you have a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Dean

January 16, 2002

To the Editor

Early Pheasant Opener Warrants a Chance
By: Dean Hildebrand, Director
North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Dear Editor:

Throughout the past decade, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has evaluated hunting and fishing seasons, looking for ways to expand opportunities for hunters and anglers while maintaining the wildlife resources our state so dearly treasures. Many of these efforts started as experiments and have since become standard practices. We have decided to try a modest change in the pheasant season. We would open the season one week earlier in 2002 only. Our plan is to open it one week after the waterfowl season opens. I'm hoping we can foster more understanding of this change by providing some details.

It is no secret that proposals have been floating around for several years to expand the time frame for the pheasant season. Those proposals ranged from always opening the season the first Saturday in October, which was favored by commercial interests, to adding to the length of the season after the normal closing date in January.

The current proposed change is modest. The pheasant season usually opens the second weekend in October. This year we recommend that the season open one week earlier - October 5 rather than the 12. For the next three years the season would be exactly as it is now, the second week in October. This would give us three years to evaluate and discuss the experimental early opening. In the past decade, pheasant season openings have ranged from October 8 to October 14. In reality, we are only opening an average of 3½ days earlier. By following the waterfowl season, the opening day of the pheasant season will be the same as it is now for three out of four years, with 2002 being the one exception. This

also allows hunters to take part on opening day for both waterfowl and pheasants if they choose to do so.

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Of greatest importance is that the change gives hunters across the state one additional week to enjoy the beautiful fall weather in the beginning of the season as well as allowing the possibility of additional economic activity. It allows husbands and wives, youngsters and our older hunters, a little extra time to spend in the field. It allows family members to come home for a sport they enjoy and allows the public to enjoy a little more of our outdoors during the fall. That's really what it's all about.

I have reviewed the proposal with the management team at the Game and Fish Department, who believe that there is no biological reason not to make the change. I am confident that a few days will not make a significant difference in the coloration of a majority of roosters; biologically, an extra few days at the beginning of the season is not going to hurt the pheasant population. No matter when the pheasant season starts, some roosters from late hatches are not fully colored. I feel that the Department should provide the greatest opportunity for hunting in our state. This is one way of doing so. We will test the new season this fall and evaluate it carefully.

In order to provide opening dates in our 2002 *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine calendar edition, we needed to make a fairly firm recommendation on the opening. Governor Hoeven and I have discussed the earlier opener and agreed to give it a try. We will also thoroughly evaluate the season to see if it meets our expectation. We then have a three-year period of time to discuss with the public whether the program should continue or if we should retain the second week opening in October.

At this point, the Governor and the Department feel it is a wise change and one we should test. We look forward to seeing the results and ask for your support.

Sincerely,

Dean Hildebrand, Director
North Dakota Game and Fish Department